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THE DOMINATION OF AMERICAN MUSIC BY TRADE UNIONS

BY EDWIN LITCHFIELD TURNBULL

AT last our country is awakening to the dire necessity—I had almost said extremity—of the art-starved laboring classes and is making provision each summer for an increasing number of free concerts in public parks by military bands! With but few exceptions such concerts are given by civilian musicians, Federal bands taking but a small part in the musical life of the nation.

The richest country in the world spends practically nothing for the encouragement of the musical culture sadly needed by our hundred millions of polyglot population, leaving almost entirely to the generosity of private citizens the support of musical enterprises, with some desultory assistance from municipal and State governments.

One of the first instances of a municipally endowed Symphony Orchestra was that started in Baltimore recently although for years it has been customary in many American cities to provide free Band Concerts in summer, and last year New York carried out a most successful experiment in Summer Symphony Concerts and in Grand Opera performances given in the open air.

Our Symphony Orchestras, Opera Houses and Conservatories, including some of the finest in the world, derive no encouragement or subsidy from the government, contrary to the custom among other nations. We have apparently not yet realized what joy a widely diffused love of music would bring into the restless, discontented lives of our working classes.

The bands of the United States Army and Navy make poor showing in comparison with the splendid government bands of Europe, which have a large share in the musical education of the masses. Among many vivid impressions of European music for the people, I recall with special pleasure the concerts in the Piazza San Marco by the fine Military Bands of Venice; on the Pincian Hill by the wonderful Municipal Band of Rome; in Edinburgh by the picturesque kilted band of the Royal Scottish Highlanders; by famous English regimental bands in Hyde Park, London, and in Munich by the magnificent bands of the Bavarian Army. There is nothing corresponding to such occasions as these in our musical life, excepting perhaps the summer concerts of the Marine Band in Washington. Most of our summer concerts are given by civilian bands which do not compare in any sense with the superb foreign bands alluded to. It often happens that in order to get a contract for municipal concerts in an American city the leader of the band is required to be more of a politician than a musician.

In a country where the production of Military Band music is governed by business or political rather than artistic considerations it is not surprising to find that the typical American band is very different in quality from the average government band of Europe, with which music, not politics or business, is the first consideration.

This comment does not apply to leading American Concert bands, which may not be considered typical. These are exceptional organizations, dependent for their success upon artistic merit and not relying

upon political pull for engagements. The leaders of these bands are not politicians but musicians, as are also all the men who play under their direction.

However, considering our enormous population, the number of first class bands is very small, not nearly sufficient to set decent standards for band music or to counteract the effect of the average civilian band, whose votes can generally be counted on when election day comes round but whose *notes* are often an uncertain quantity.

It seems unfortunate that our standards of band music should be left so largely in the hands of Labor Unions, which may be quite admirable and necessary for the regulation of trades, but not for art.

When the great mass of our population wakens to the fact that the very small minority represented by Labor Unions, not content with the powerful influence they have acquired in the general business and legislation of the country, is now attempting to interfere with art standards, which should be outside the jurisdiction of trade bodies, we shall see a great improvement.

It does not seem likely that the American Federation of Musicians, with 72,000 members, could hope ultimately to control the musical destinies of this great nation, even if they could rely upon the unanimous support of the United Federation of Labor with over 2,000,000 members—a matter of considerable doubt. Thank heaven! The canon that art must be free and open to the whole world has become so firmly established that not even that marvellous awesome thing of which our politicians whisper with bated breath, the "Labor Vote," can pull down the Fair Goddess from her pedestal, however much it would please the Labor Unions to place their "Union Label" above the laurel wreath upon her brow. And with the constant spread of musical culture and ever-increasing number of musicians, both amateur and professional, outside the ranks of the Musical Unions, the comparative strength of the latter organizations is continually diminishing.

Formerly Musical Unions permitted their members to play engagements with amateurs and other musicians outside the Union ranks, and there was very considerable cooperation between Union and non-Union musicians. Now, this more liberal policy has given place to a practical boycott of non-members by the Federation of Musicians, which apparently regards as enemies all that vast number of devoted friends of musical art, both amateur and professional, who have committed the unforgivable sin of not paying dues to the Union. They are "taking the bread from the mouths" of those more worthy citizens who are Union members!

In other words, it is wrong for one with musical yearnings in his soul to "toot or scrape" in any band or orchestra unless he wears the Union label upon his sleeve. Our Legislatures must see to it that the field of instrumental music is reserved exclusively for musicians who wear this decoration, "because they are taxpayers."

That is, a few of them are. The vast majority of taxpayers are not members of the Union. Yet we are permitting that badge of mediocrity which is fatal to art, and which is slowly but surely killing off keen ambition and individuality in the mechanical trades to be fastened upon us.

While this state of affairs may be tolerated in so far as it relates to the trades, it seems reasonably clear that we cannot afford to trust our art ideals to the tender mercies of trade organizations.

Did Michelangelo, Beethoven or Shakespeare wear the "Union Label" and work only "eight hours"?

But surely, one exclaims, in a free country like America, the artist is permitted to follow his calling after his own bent?

Is this a free country? Are we, who submitted calmly to the spectacle of organized labor putting a pistol to the heads of an American President and Congress, the same Anglo-Saxons who fought for freedom under George Washington?

In June, 1916, an Act of Congress was passed prohibiting enlisted men in the Army, Navy or Marine Corps, whether non-commissioned officer, musician or private, "to engage in any pursuit, business or performance in civil life, for emolument, hire or otherwise, when the same shall interfere with the customary employment and regular engagement of local civilians in the respective arts, trades or professions."

For years prior to the passing of this labor legislation our government had not permitted Federal Musicians to play outside engagements in competition with civilian musicians, with the single exception of the Band of the United States Marine Corps, which, largely owing to the privilege in question, had attained the distinction of being the foremost Military Band of the United States. First under the famous "March King" Sousa, and later, for the past eighteen years, under Bandmaster Santelmann, who has brought the Band to the highest point of efficiency in its long history of more than one hundred years, these fine musicians have been making a larger contribution to American musical life than any other military band.

In the extended annual tours over the country, the winter concerts at the Marine Barracks, the string music at White House functions and the open-air concerts in summer given on the Capitol steps, the White House grounds and the Potomac Driveway, Mr. Santelmann and his musicians have had an unusual opportunity to bring music to the people, of which they have availed themselves in a splendid manner. In addition to this official work, members of the band were formerly permitted in free hours to take outside engagements in Washington and elsewhere. The largest salary paid even to solo players was, I think, \$72 a month; or very much less than such musicians could earn in civilian bands. It is apparent, therefore, that without the privilege of outside engagements, yielding very considerable additional income, it would not have been possible to attract musicians of the high standard required for the "President's Band" or properly to maintain the dignity of the United States Government.

The majority of the present members of the Band enlisted with the understanding that they would be permitted to supplement the meagre government salaries by outside income, and the government thus

secured the services of high grade musicians at the minimum of expense. This method has been followed by other countries, notably in England and Germany, where are to be found some of the finest military bands in the world. These countries have favored competition between government and civilian musicians under certain reasonable restrictions which amply protect civilian musical organizations against unfair competition.

When civilian musicians are efficient they have nothing to fear from Federal competition. When they are inefficient they should not be protected by class legislation, unworthy of a democratic constitution and enacted for the exclusive benefit of the members of the American Federation of Musicians. Such legislation is particularly harmful to the interests of our enormous industrial population, only a very small percentage of which is affiliated with Labor Unions. No part of our population stands in more desperate need of the Gospel of Music than the laboring classes. Yet, by the irony of fate, it is the very legislation demanded by the Labor Unions which robs the laboring man of his just dues in music. It would be difficult indeed to overestimate the joy which a liberal providing of free music would bring into his unromantic life. Many a corner saloon would be cheated out of old customers on nights "when the band plays."

The taxpayers of this country foot a staggering bill for the maintenance of our Military and Naval establishments, not to mention the gigantic pensions graft, and they surely have a right to expect that the musical standards of service bands shall be maintained with a dignity worthy of a great nation, and that Federal Musicians will be allowed to play a proper part in the musical education of the people, as they do in other countries, *whether the Labor Unions like it or not.*

The average government musician has plenty of free time when he could without interference with official duties engage in outside musical work, thereby improving his art and his income. There would be many opportunities for obtaining outside work in cases where government bands are stationed in or near large cities. In both England and Germany the percentage of population affiliated with Labor Unions is approximately three times what it is in the United States; yet in neither country are the Unions permitted to interfere with government musicians. Why should the United States permit it? Is freedom more respected in England and Germany? I have received a letter from the distinguished London music publishers, Messrs. Boosey & Company, from which the following is a quotation:

"In England as elsewhere competition exists between military and civil bands, but an understanding has been reached between the Trade Unions and our governing authorities that Military Bands may be permitted full freedom to accept private engagements, so long as they do not under-price their civil competitors, i. e., they must not accept work at rates lower than those recognized by the Union; nor are they likely to infringe this stipulation. In ordinary times our leading Guards bands, our Artillery and Engineer bands fill a very large number of important engagements during the year, and in the summer months many of the bands of our line regiments obtain engagements throughout the country,

particularly at seaside resorts. Our military bands are always under strict military discipline when fulfilling an engagement."

In Germany the conditions under which government musicians may compete with civilian musicians are practically the same as in England.

When we consider the immense influence of government bands upon the musical life of Europe and the huge contribution which they have made to the happiness of the workingman, no thoughtful American can feel contented with present conditions in our own land in regard to Federal musicians.

Is it not extraordinary that in this enormous country, with a population equal to France, Italy, Spain and Holland combined, our government only maintains one celebrated concert band? According to recent reports there were formerly some eighty-six bands maintained by the United States Army, with a total of 2,453 musicians, averaging about 28 to each band. They were qualified as "first class" receiving \$36 per month; "second class" \$30, and "third class" \$24.

Is it likely that first-class civilian musicians would give up profitable employment at \$25—\$50 a week to work for the government at such rates as the above, when the privilege of outside engagements is denied? It is not surprising then that the bands of the United States Army contribute so little to our musical life!

There is another phase to this matter almost as important as the musical side.

What an inspiring thing it is to see the flame of patriotism sweep over an audience of working people in England, Germany, France or Italy, when the band plays the National Anthem! Shall we ever see the happy day in America when our entire population is united in National Spirit and Love of Country? when easy-going pleasure-seeking Americans would make such noble sacrifices for home and country as the peasants of England, Germany, France and Italy have been called upon to make?

Patriotism! The average American has not the faintest conception of the word, as it stands revealed by tortured Europe today! And yet how much might be accomplished for the cause of patriotism, if government musicians were permitted to cast off the fettering bonds of Labor legislation!

Shortly before the passing of the Act of Congress prohibiting enlisted men from competing with civilians Secretary Daniels granted the request of the Labor Unions that the Marine Band be deprived of the special privilege of outside engagements, hitherto allowed.

Congress then had before it the alternative of either largely increasing the appropriation to maintain the Marine Band, or else of seeing the official musical organization of the government rapidly deteriorate in efficiency.

The case was most admirably set forth in a Bill introduced by Major-General Barnett, the able Commandant of the Marine Corps, which bill was later passed by Congress in all its provisions. The bill provided that the Leader of the Band should be

raised to the rank and pay of Captain in the Marine Corps; that the Second Leader be raised to the rank of a Sergeant-Major, with pay of \$150 a month, and that the band should contain in addition sixty-five musicians apportioned as follows:

Ten solo musicians at \$125 per month; 25 "first class" musicians at \$100 per month; 20 "second class" at \$85, and 10 "third class" at \$70.

The musicians are required to give their entire time to the service of the government, which in this case will be devoted chiefly to the rendition of high grade concert music, and the Marine Band will occupy among the Military bands of the country a position relatively as independent and important as that which is held by the Boston Symphony among American Orchestras. Both organizations are permanently maintained at good salaries for the advancement of musical art, with an assured future and are independent of Labor Unions. Thus a unique opportunity for service to the cause of musical culture—particularly in the field of free music for the working population—awaits Captain Santelmann and the musicians of the Marine Band, an opportunity of which I feel very sure they will take full advantage.

I should like to see the government enlarge the Band to one hundred musicians in order that it might be on an equal footing with the world's most famous bands, not only in quality but in volume of tone, and to see the scope of duty extended to include a tour of free concerts each year in important cities for the purpose of acquainting the people with the musical qualities of the nation's finest Military Band and to rouse more patriotism and respect for the United States flag and uniform.

Having this object in view, perhaps it might be possible to have in attendance at these special concerts a drum corps and field music detachment and a detail of regular troops, to participate in the salute to the colors during the playing of the National Anthem.

The enactment of special legislation for the maintenance of the Marine Band, induces the hope that at last our government has entered upon an era of official encouragement to musical art, and that in the not distant future we may hope for orchestras, opera houses and conservatories maintained wholly or in part by the United States. Why not?

And perhaps in the future we shall also see a change in the policy adopted for Federal musicians, which will enable our government to secure high-grade musicians on the same terms as they are secured in other countries, by allowing competition with civilian musicians under reasonable restrictions. This would encourage the development of efficient concert bands in the government service, which would make for the advancement of musical culture in America, and for the general pleasure of the whole population, foster patriotism and at the same time serve as a most useful artistic stimulus for our civilian musicians, without bringing any unfair competition against them.

Edwin Litchfield Turnbull